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Stuart, Henry Harvey

Social and moral reform

[S.l.]

[1911]

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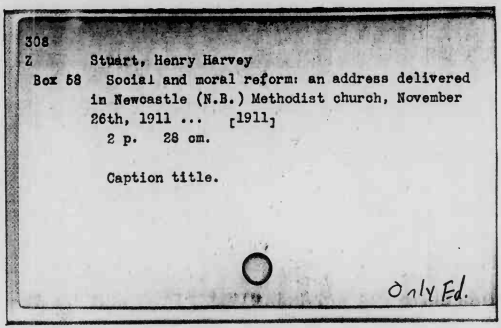

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STUART
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SOCIAL AND
MORAL
REFORM

Oxford
STOCK No. 152⅓
MADE IN U.S.A.

SOCIAL AND MORAL REFORM

An Address Delivered in Newcastle (N. B.) Methodist Church, November 26th, 1911, by Henry Harvey Stuart, District Secretary of the Temperance and Moral Reform Committee.

308
Box 58

Mr. Stuart took as the basis of his discourse the parable of the Good Samaritan, the text being from Luke X: 37—"Go thou and do likewise."

"Go thou and do likewise," said Jesus of Nazareth to the young man to whom He spoke that wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan. Those words are his marching orders to His followers not only for that but for all time.

What does that command of the Master mean to us who profess to accept Him as our leader and guide? It means just what it says—not a bit more—not a particle less. And we who bear the name of Christian must measure up to that standard, else we bring the name of the Christ into disrepute and hinder rather than help His cause.

This command of Jesus was not a new one. An old Testament prophet centuries before had declared it man's duty to love his neighbor as himself and had strengthened the definition of neighbor by ordaining (see Leviticus, Chapter 25) that the poor of the land—even though they should be strangers—be relieved and that no interest be charged them, and that if any land outside of walled cities were sold it should be returned free to the original owners at the Jubilee.

But the same prophet had permitted vengeance upon an enemy, whether compatriot or foreign, and even the faithful came to regard the command to love one's neighbor as referring only to one's relatives and friends. So, the striking part of the parable is Jesus' definition of the word neighbor. To the Master a neighbor was anyone—rich or poor, native or foreign, friend or enemy, Jew or Gentile—who needed his help.

Such teaching was new to the man to whom Jesus spoke, and, alas! after the lapse of almost nineteen centuries it is still new and strange to many of us who style ourselves Christians—to many of us who imagine we know and live up to the obligations imposed upon those who bear that sacred name.

The man whom the Samaritan rescued had fallen upon evil days. In his own country, and presumably by people of his own blood, he had been assaulted and robbed and left helpless and half dead. The priest—the representative of the clerical orders—also of his own blood and faith, passed by him. He was bound for the temple to officiate in the public worship of the All-Father; and had no time to spend upon any unfortunate individual child of that Father. The Levite—the representative of the lay workers of the church—came and looked upon the wounded man and passed on. The Levite was needed in the temple for more important work than that of lifting up and saving one who, by appearances at least, had neither money nor friends. Perhaps the danger attending any delay in such a place—for might not the robbers be near to pounce upon another victim?—kept the priest and the Levite from lingering in the vicinity of the helpless one. But whatever their reasons for continuing their journey it was all the same to the wounded man. He was doomed so far as they were concerned.

But along comes one who is neither priest nor laymen—not even a Jew—but one of a nation despised and hated by the pure blooded orthodox Jew because of its mixture of race and heresy of faith. The Samaritan, however, sees in the wounded man not the bigoted Jew, not the man of superior caste, not the implacable foe, but merely a human being—a brother—in distress. Regardless of danger—for he knows not how near the man's assailants are nor their number nor strength—he dismounts at once, spares no pains to revive the stranger, gives up his beast to the latter while he trudges along by his side, takes him to the nearest hotel, pays his present bills and pledges his own credit until the patient is well again. No questions are asked as to the stranger's previous record or his ability to repay the kindness. And the proud young lawyer who asked "Who is my neighbor?" is pointed to the good Samaritan and told, "Go thou and do likewise"

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INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE

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What the Master said to the Jewish lawyer is certainly meant for us and for all men. Let us, therefore, enquire what the spirit of the parable enjoins upon Christians who live in the present age of the world under the present forms of society and the present economic conditions. A correct answer to this question is of vital importance to all connected with what is called Social and Moral Reform.

Never were there more prostrate, bleeding, helpless victims on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem than there are now, and never has the injunction of the Master to imitate the Good Samaritan been more imperative than it is at the present day.

The young man starting out for himself early falls in with those who worm their way into his confidence until, through the fatal suggestion of their filthy conversation, pictures, books or plays, their disregard of the reverence due to parents, elders, the educated and those necessarily and properly holding positions of trust and authority, and the dealing out of alcohol and other stimulating and narcotic poisons so common in our land, he goes down to destruction more horrible and more irrevocable than that narrowly escaped by the traveller in the parable. He is robbed of his purity, his character is blasted, his body ruined—he has fallen among thieves.

All have to eat. Once the average fare, however coarse, was pure. The poorest and humblest had a sufficiency of substantial and nourishing food. But what do reports, even of government analysts, now tell us? Continually of the discovery of new adulterations in food, until no one can feel sure that any factory-made product—at least if it be anyway cheap—is fit to eat. The millions of poor who live from hand to mouth, and cannot pick and choose but have to take whatever is offered them or starve, are decimated by disease directly traceable to adulterated food. Many of them have fallen among thieves.

So clothing of all kinds except the very best grades, is, as often as not, adulterated with cheap materials of small value, to the great disadvantage of the retail purchaser. Where is it possible to purchase rubbers, for instance, that will wear as long and well as they should?

The world's industry is now largely controlled by "Trusts," to whom the whose one-time independence has by these various combinations of capital been reduced to a mere shadow, have to pay tribute. Buying and selling has to be done at prices fixed by the Trusts, and many are beginning to ask whether the people as a whole have not fallen among thieves?

The working man, who has nothing to sell but his labor power, finds that he may work only upon the terms offered by the landlord or the owner of the machine, with the result that this labor power is bought and sold in the market just like any other commodity. And the more machinery there is the less demand there is for human labor, and, therefore, the less price is paid for it—the less grows the proportion the laborer receives of what value he creates, the more the owners of the land and machine appropriate to themselves, and the faster poverty, misery and economic and political unrest increase in the land. This unrest will continue to grow until the worker obtains full justice or is again reduced to the old-fashioned slavery.

A terrible blot on our civilization is the White Slave traffic. It is not at all a new condition—this traffic in women for immoral purposes—for it has been going on since the beginning of history, but it should have no place among Christian people. It has several causes.

The natural depravity of man and woman accounts for only a small part of the social evil. Only a few men and a much less proportion of women descend to such depths of their own free will unimpelled by love of gain or by physical or economic necessity. Man is naturally chivalrous to women and the great majority of women are naturally pure.

The profit there is in the White Slave traffic leads some to make a business of kidnapping and betraying any defenceless girl that falls into their hands. The penalty for such a crime should be the severest known to the law, not, as is too often the case, a short term of imprisonment.

The chief cause of sexual immorality is due to our economic system. Since the introduction of labor-saving machinery on a large scale employment has become less certain and the purchasing power of men's wages has sensibly decreased. This has led many young men to continue single life in hotels and lodging-houses rather than face the sacrifices of comfort and pecuniary security which would be involved in marriage. Then again, as the married man's wages become less and less proportionate to his needs, first his boys and finally his daughters and, in many cases, his wife, have to go into the labor market to help supply the family's food and pay the rent. These women and children work more cheaply than men and, in the end, cut down men's wages in many lines of industry and in many other lines displace men altogether. This decreases the ability of men to support families and renders it necessary for the women to keep on working outside of their homes. And, due no doubt to such conditions many men drift into immoral channels. The wretchedly poor pay of thousands of women who try to earn a living respectably but find that virtue is the only reward of such a course and whose natural desire is to better their circumstances, renders them peculiarly susceptible to the lure of the seducer and kidnapper.

Why do girls flock to factories rather than take employment as domestics in safe and sheltered homes? Because of the social inferiority they are too often made to feel there. If girls were used as equals and made to feel at home the servant problem would not be such a difficult one. But as long as servants are used as they generally are, so long will girls prefer the harder and more dangerous but more congenial life of the crowded factory in spite of the snares and pitfalls of unchaperoned city life.

Outside of a revival of faith, always necessary before any reform or revolution is complete, the remedy for immorality is economic. Give every man the full value of his work and his female relatives will not, unless they wish to do so, have to look for work outside their own homes.

Our economic system and the religious ideas we have founded upon it are wrong. Only the spirit of brotherhood and co-operation dimly foreshadowded by the earlier prophets and fully taught by Jesus and His disciples can save the world. The individualist theory of everyone for himself has failed and can never succeed. All for each and each for all is the better way. Not until the spirit of Jesus dominates society will the objects of social and moral reform be achieved—poverty abolished, crime and suffering reduced to a minimum and the Kingdom of God established upon the earth.

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